

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF IOWA  
WESTERN DIVISION

KATHRYNE L.,

Plaintiff,

vs.

MARTIN O'MALLEY, Commissioner of  
Social Security,

Defendant.

No. C24-4011-LTS-KEM

**MEMORANDUM OPINION AND  
ORDER ON REPORT AND  
RECOMMENDATION**

***I. INTRODUCTION***

This case is before me on a Report and Recommendation (R&R) by Chief United States Magistrate Judge Kelly K.E. Mahoney. Doc. 16. Judge Mahoney recommends that I reverse and remand the decision by the Commissioner of Social Security (the Commissioner) denying Kathryne L.'s applications for disability insurance benefits (DIB) and supplemental security income (SSI) benefits under Titles II and XVI of the Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. §§ 401-34, 1381-85.<sup>1</sup> Neither party has objected to the R&R. The deadline for such objections has expired.

***II. APPLICABLE STANDARDS***

***A. Judicial Review of the Commissioner's Decision***

The Commissioner's decision must be affirmed "if it is supported by substantial evidence on the record as a whole." *Pelkey v. Barnhart*, 433 F.3d 575, 577 (8th Cir. 2006); *see* 42 U.S.C. § 405(g) ("The findings of the Commissioner of Social Security as

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the recommendation of the Committee on Court Administration and Case Management of the Judicial Conference of the United States, I will refer to a Social Security claimant by his or her first name and last initial due to significant privacy concerns.

to any fact, if supported by substantial evidence, shall be conclusive . . .”). “Substantial evidence is less than a preponderance, but enough that a reasonable mind might accept as adequate to support a conclusion.” *Lewis v. Barnhart*, 353 F.3d 642, 645 (8th Cir. 2003). The Eighth Circuit explains the standard as “something less than the weight of the evidence and [that] allows for the possibility of drawing two inconsistent conclusions, thus it embodies a zone of choice within which the [Commissioner] may decide to grant or deny benefits without being subject to reversal on appeal.” *Culbertson v. Shalala*, 30 F.3d 934, 939 (8th Cir. 1994).

To determine whether the Commissioner’s decision meets this standard, the court considers “all of the evidence that was before the ALJ, but it [does] not re-weigh the evidence.” *Vester v. Barnhart*, 416 F.3d 886, 889 (8th Cir. 2005). The court considers both evidence that supports the Commissioner’s decision and evidence that detracts from it. *Kluesner v. Astrue*, 607 F.3d 533, 536 (8th Cir. 2010). The court must “search the record for evidence contradicting the [Commissioner’s] decision and give that evidence appropriate weight when determining whether the overall evidence in support is substantial.” *Baldwin v. Barnhart*, 349 F.3d 549, 555 (8th Cir. 2003) (citing *Cline v. Sullivan*, 939 F.2d 560, 564 (8th Cir. 1991)).

To evaluate the evidence in an appeal of a denial of benefits, the court must apply a balancing test to assess any contradictory evidence. *Sobania v. Sec’y of Health & Human Servs.*, 879 F.2d 441, 444 (8th Cir. 1989). The court, however, does not “reweigh the evidence presented to the ALJ,” *Baldwin*, 349 F.3d at 555 (citing *Bates v. Chater*, 54 F.3d 529, 532 (8th Cir. 1995)), or “review the factual record de novo.” *Roe v. Chater*, 92 F.3d 672, 675 (8th Cir. 1996) (citing *Naber v. Shalala*, 22 F.3d 186, 188 (8th Cir. 1994)). Instead, if, after reviewing the evidence, the court finds it “possible to draw two inconsistent positions from the evidence and one of those positions represents the Commissioner’s findings, [the court] must affirm the [Commissioner’s] denial of benefits.” *Kluesner*, 607 F.3d at 536 (quoting *Finch v. Astrue*, 547 F.3d 933, 935 (8th Cir. 2008)). This is true even in cases where the court “might have weighed the evidence

differently.” *Culbertson*, 30 F.3d at 939 (quoting *Browning v. Sullivan*, 958 F.2d 817, 822 (8th Cir. 1992)). The court may not reverse the Commissioner’s decision “merely because substantial evidence would have supported an opposite decision.” *Baker v. Heckler*, 730 F.2d 1147, 1150 (8th Cir. 1984); *see Goff v. Barnhart*, 421 F.3d 785, 789 (8th Cir. 2005) (“[A]n administrative decision is not subject to reversal simply because some evidence may support the opposite conclusion.”).

#### ***B. Review of Report and Recommendation***

A district judge reviews a magistrate judge’s R&R under the following standards:

Within fourteen days after being served with a copy, any party may serve and file written objections to such proposed findings and recommendations as provided by rules of court. A judge of the court shall make a de novo determination of those portions of the report or specified proposed findings or recommendations to which objection is made. A judge of the court may accept, reject, or modify, in whole or in part, the findings or recommendations made by the magistrate judge. The judge may also receive further evidence or recommit the matter to the magistrate judge with instructions.

28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); *see also* Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b). Thus, when a party objects to any portion of an R&R, the district judge must undertake a de novo review of that portion.

Any portions of an R&R to which no objections have been made must be reviewed under at least a “clearly erroneous” standard. *See, e.g., Grinder v. Gammon*, 73 F.3d 793, 795 (8th Cir. 1996) (noting that when no objections are filed “[the district court judge] would only have to review the findings of the magistrate judge for clear error”). As the Supreme Court has explained, “[a] finding is ‘clearly erroneous’ when although there is evidence to support it, the reviewing court on the entire evidence is left with the definite and firm conviction that a mistake has been committed.” *Anderson v. City of Bessemer City*, 470 U.S. 564, 573-74 (1985) (quoting *United States v. U.S. Gypsum Co.*, 333 U.S. 364, 395 (1948)). However, a district judge may elect to review an R&R under a more-exacting standard even if no objections are filed:

Any party that desires plenary consideration by the Article III judge of any issue need only ask. Moreover, while the statute does not require the judge to review an issue *de novo* if no objections are filed, it does not preclude further review by the district judge, *sua sponte* or at the request of a party, under a *de novo* or any other standard.

*Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140, 150 (1985).

### ***III. DISCUSSION***

Because the parties did not object to the R&R, I have reviewed it for clear error. Judge Mahoney applied the appropriate legal standards in considering whether substantial evidence in the record as a whole supported the ALJ's decision, particularly the residual functional capacity (RFC) determination in which the ALJ credited the state agency consultant opinions but adopted a less restrictive RFC and failed to explain why. Based on my review of the record, I find no error – clear or otherwise – in Judge Mahoney's recommendation to remand for the ALJ to either include the more restrictive limitation in the RFC or explain why he did not do so. As such, I adopt the R&R in its entirety.

### ***IV. CONCLUSION***

For the reasons set forth herein:

1. I accept the Report and Recommendation (Doc. 16) without modification. *See 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1).*
2. Pursuant to Judge Mahoney's recommendation:
  - a. The Commissioner's determination that the Claimant was not disabled is **reversed** and this matter is **remanded** to the Commissioner for further proceedings as described by Judge Mahoney.
  - b. Judgment shall enter in favor of the Claimant and against the Commissioner.
  - c. If the Claimant wishes to request an award of attorney's fees and costs under the Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA), 28 U.S.C. § 2412, an

application may be filed up until 30 days after the judgment becomes “not appealable,” i.e., 30 days after the 60-day time for appeal has ended. *See Shalala v. Schaefer*, 509 U.S. 292, 296 (1933); 28 U.S.C. §§ 2412(d)(1)(B), (d)(2)(G).

**IT IS SO ORDERED** this 5th day of December, 2024.



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Leonard T. Strand  
United States District Judge